

WORKERS

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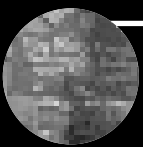


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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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WORKERS

“ Phoney war, real disgrace

THE BATTLE over public-sector pensions is not over yet, whatever victories may be trumpeted following the latest agreement between unions and government. In fact, the battle has yet to start. All we have seen so far is posturing, designed not to preserve decent pensions but to save the blushes of a Labour government that knows no shame anyway.

First there was the Warwick agreement, a set of vague promises that secured union support for the last election. Then came, in March this year, shortly before the election, the Grand Old Duke of York scenario, where battalions were marched halfway up to struggle, then down again, for the sole purpose of showing how well (!) the government and the unions worked together. Now there is the sorry tale (see pages 6–7), of an agreement that safeguards the pension rights of existing workers, allegedly, but submits future workers to a double sacrifice: they must work another five years, and pay more for the pensions they will receive.

And why will new workers pay more? To subsidise the government's “concession” over the existing workers. This shameful agreement, trumpeted as victory by the unions, sells the rights of the next generation.

At the same time, unions have agreed to split off health, education and civil service

workers from their colleagues in local government, with consequences that cannot yet be precisely quantified but which cannot bring anything positive.

But why give way at all? The financial arguments advanced by the government are completely phoney, and driven by the need to cut public expenditure to meet EU targets. As the article “Anatomy of a theft” says, a bit more understanding of economics would not go amiss among trade unionists. Nor would a bit more understanding of politics. This government has agreed to a 50-year deal, which gives it half a century to find ways of getting out of what it has agreed to. On that basis, just how safe are the public-sector pensions covered by this shameful deal now, in 10 years' time, in 20 years' time?

And now that the unity of public-sector workers has been surrendered, what are local government workers, the members of the Local Government Pension Scheme, left with?

In all this sorry saga, union members must look to themselves for salvation. At the start of this year only 23% voted in the Unison ballot for action over the government's pension plans. Other unions did not even conduct ballots. Workers themselves must take responsibility for their pensions. By now, one thing should be crystal clear: no one else will.



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Cover photograph shows TUC pensions demonstration, 19 July 2004.

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08

**GATE GOURMET****IRAQ****LOCAL GOV'T****PARLIAMENT****FOOD****EDUCATION****EUROTRASH****CONSTITUTION****NEWS ANALYSIS****NEWS FOCUS**

Not over yet

Record US demonstration

Islington goes north west

Cleaners to strike again

Terry's moves to Europe

New white paper attack

The latest from Brussels

EU tries to keep it alive

In a flap over bird flu

The new pensions scandal

Not over yet at Gate Gourmet

AFTER SACKING 700 staff by megaphone, US-owned catering company Gate Gourmet came to an agreement with the Transport and General Workers Union at the end of September, endorsed by the stewards and accepted by the majority of members at the company. Tony Woodley, the T&G General Secretary, announced that the "great majority of our members" would either go back to work or take voluntary redundancy.

The figures involved are that 187 should have their jobs back, 210 could have voluntary redundancy, and the company also wants 144 compulsory redundancies – which include those they have termed "trouble makers" (read union activists). It was hoped that these would get representation at a fair appeals procedure and receive compensation. The union says its members would have been made redundant without compensation had it not been for the dispute. As yet the company has not made available any names of people who got their jobs back, or received redundancy pay.

The settlement depends on Gate Gourmet and British Airways agreeing on a five-year extension of the catering contract. But more than two weeks later the union was expressing concern that the companies were delaying resolution. Brendan Gold, the union's national secretary for civil aviation, said that though members had acted in good faith, the delays were causing "a mounting degree of frustration amongst our people". This was evidenced by the mass rally at Beacon Hill on 23 October.

Gate Gourmet has said it will not sign the new contract with BA until all the union members agree to the September deal. They blame the union for not gaining this support, and for supporting what they term an illegal wildcat strike in the first place. The caterers are owned by Texas Pacific Group, which is pushing it to produce better results for their shareholders. TPG had a plan in place to provoke a strike, then to sack the work force and fly in scab labour from outside Britain. The T&G had accused Gate Gourmet of a "cynical plot to get rid of their [unionised] workforce."

Within little over a week of the Heathrow agreement Gate Gourmet was involved in a new dispute in Germany, at Düsseldorf airport. Negotiations over the collective agreement between the company and the German food and restaurant union had been started in August. The German union asked for 4.5% pay increase. Company negotiators demanded concessions on holidays, working hours, and shift allowances. Gate Gourmet threatened redundancies, whereupon 90 workers went out on strike and put up a picket line.

If you have news from your industry, trade or profession we want to hear from you. Call us or fax on 020 8801 9543 or e-mail to rebuilding@workers.org.uk

IDENTITY CARDS

Mass protest in Netherlands

IN THE NETHERLANDS around 250 people who took part in a campaign of civil disobedience against identity cards have been brought to trial in the Dutch city of Utrecht.

Anti-terrorism legislation introduced in the Netherlands in January this year requires everybody over the age of 14 to carry an identity card at all times. Over 50,000 people have been arrested and fined since the law came in.

A standing fine of £34 applies to the offence.

The Nazis were the last regime to pass such legislation in the Netherlands. Now we have the "war on terror" excuse, sponsored by the EU.

UNITED STATES

Huge anti-war demonstration

WHILE ANTI-WAR marches in Britain are largely unreported, 24 September saw the largest anti-Iraq war demonstration in recent United States history.

Over 300,000 demonstrators from over 350 towns and cities marched on Washington DC, and encircled the White House.

Many demonstrators compared the Iraq invasion with the US rout in Vietnam, even though most of the marchers were born after the final defeat of the US thirty years ago.

The demonstration, acknowledged by the police as one of the largest in living memory, passed without incident, although the authorities provided protection for the motley pro-Bush counter-demonstration of less people.

EUROTRASH

The latest from Brussels

Collective bargaining 'illegal'

EU COMMISSIONER Charlie McCreevy has declared that Swedish collective wage agreements breach EU laws on the freedom of movement. The commissioner will testify before the European Court of Justice in an upcoming case brought by a Latvian company, which was awarded a contract in Sweden but refused to abide by Sweden's collective agreement on wages and conditions for workers. The company tried to import Latvia's very poor wages and conditions into Sweden.

In response, Swedish trade unions defended their members' wages and conditions by blockading the Latvian company, pushing it into bankruptcy. The Swedish TUC has hinted that it will withdraw support for Swedish EU membership altogether if the ECJ rules against collective bargaining.

Attacking Africa

The EU's Economic Partnership Agreements will plunge African countries further into poverty. Kenya's EPA agreement with the EU will open 90% of the country's market to European business, and will remove 82% of their customs income. Far from healing Africa's scars, EPAs would inflict gaping new wounds.

The wrong side of history?

Siim Kallas, the EU Commission's Vice-President, has attacked critics of the EU's economic policies, saying they do not "know what liberalism is". He said, "The forces of protectionists want to keep ... the 'Polish plumber' in Poland in order to safeguard social privileges at home." He added that opponents of the policies were "outdated forces in the old Europe ... on the side of economic conservatism, and therefore on the wrong side of history".

Loser praises Constitution

Electoral loser Gerhard Schroeder, the ousted German Chancellor, speaking at a Europa Forum meeting in Strasbourg, said that the European Constitution "is certainly not perfect, but it is a very good compromise which can and will move Europe forward decisively. This magnificent project - and I am not embarrassed to use this word - cannot be abandoned."



Flashback: 12 February this year, and cleaners first mounted their picket line outside Parliament. Now they are back in action.

Commons cleaners out again

TRANSPORT AND GENERAL Workers Union members who clean up in Parliament have decided to strike again, in a follow-up to their action in February and July, when 170 staff took to the picket line. They are only paid £5 an hour, while the MPs who make the mess earn over £60,000 a year. The union is demanding £6.70 an hour, the introduction of sick pay, pensions, and 20 days' holiday as well as public and bank holidays.

Currently they have no pension, limited holiday rights of 12 days a year and only statutory sick pay. There are health and safety issues in the form of the Lords' toilets, and the rat infested "dungeon" basement where the cleaners have their lunches.

The workers have been in dispute with contractors Mitie Cleaning and Emprise Services for several months with no prospect of a settlement. An early day motion signed by 156 MPs, which attempted to address the issue before the closure of parliament for the summer recess, met with jeering from other MPs. The prime minister had already washed his hands of the matter at question time, saying, "This is a matter for the House authorities".

Meanwhile the union has been drawing up a list of MPs who failed to support the workers' cause. This list will be published in a name-and-shame campaign if action goes ahead. The matter was also taken to the various party conferences over the summer.

MPs earn nearly £60,000 a year, with up to £40,000 in additional costs and incidental allowances, as well as substantial travel expenses for themselves and their families. And they have no contractual obligation to do any work at all. They also get up to £80,000 for office and secretarial costs. Ministers and whips earn even more, up to almost £75,000 for cabinet ministers and over £124,000 for the prime minister. There are also substantial pension benefits. As Jack Dromey, deputy general secretary of the union said, "Parliament should be ashamed of itself."

FOOD MANUFACTURE

Terry's moves to Europe

TERRY'S YORK chocolate factory closed at the beginning of October. The landmark building and employer in York has seen its 80 year history terminated. Terry's, part of the US Kraft Foods International, has had production transferred to Sweden, Belgium,

Poland and Slovakia.

Though over 300 jobs were lost on closure, what was more disturbing to York residents was that nearly all British staff had already been dismissed or taken redundancy. All long term workers, trade union members and campaigners against closure had been systematically replaced or forced out by short term employees, predominantly from Eastern Europe.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT**Islington moves north west**

THE LONDON Borough of Islington is opening a 'one stop' housing benefits call centre in Manchester. This means Islington council saves the payment of London weighting allowance on its wages bill, avoids the ignominy of having a call centre in the Far East – and also gets away from

stroppy local trade unionists.

Unfortunately the Manchester Chamber of Trade is in uproar over the wage rate, which is at least £2,000 higher than local call centre pay.

So a wage cutting exercise from London has resulted in a wage parity battle in Manchester. Unfortunately for the employer, the same stroppy trade union, Unison, organises in both Islington and Manchester!

Drastic changes for schools

THE LATEST GOVERNMENT education white paper proposes drastic changes to the service. The power of local councils would be severely curtailed: they would no longer be providers of education, but commissioners. Local authorities will have to provide a "diversity of choice". They will be barred from objecting to more popular schools expanding at the expense of other local schools. Disputes over school admission policies would be handled solely by adjudicators who would not be accountable to local people. Education secretary Kelly's brief is to introduce a diversity of suppliers, supposedly competing against each other for pupils.

Popular schools would be given a fast track to expand with as little as three months' notice. Schools funded directly by central government, but independent of local authorities and with greater curriculum freedom, are set to return – Labour's version of Tory grant-maintained schools.

The government has already stated that schools will be given freedom to own their own land, manage their assets, employ staff and form links with private sector providers by a vote of either the governors or parents themselves. Secondary schools, as well as city academies, should form partnerships with business and charities. The government expects to reach 200 city academies by 2010, even though their performance is generally patchy and poor in some notable cases.

Education workers, parents and students want good schools in all areas, properly financed with fully qualified staff, not a Dutch auction between privateers. A centrally funded, locally accountable system is under ever-increasing threat. This White Paper would drive a coach and horses through the government's own national curriculum and destroy national pay agreements for teachers and school staff – a process started by the government's Workforce Remodelling programme.

We pay for our schools; private companies (including religious charities and rail companies) have no right to plunder our money. We have a right to say how our money is spent. Business has no business in education.

LIBRARIES**Sackings spark dispute**

THE SACKING of two librarians, Sue Small and Fujikko Kobayashi, from London's School of African and Oriental Studies, has sparked an unprecedented response within SOAS and across the wider academic community. The librarians were both specialists and managed the school's special collections covering China, Japan and Korea. (So much for Blair's injunction that we should learn from the Chinese.)

Over 400 members of Unison and the AUT demonstrated in Russell Square in early October and 18 senior academics have resigned their non-contractual roles, such as heading specialist research centres, in protest. This action has effectively made

the whole of Chinese, Japanese and Korean studies non-functioning.

Graham Dyer, AUT president at SOAS, said, "This is academic vandalism by the management of SOAS. The demonstrations show how angry members are at the attempts to down-grade the library and dispose of long-serving members of staff". Sue Small, who had worked for SOAS for 25 years, was not even allowed to work her notice. Two other specialist librarians remain at risk of compulsory redundancy.

Senior staff have successfully demanded an extraordinary meeting of the SOAS governing body, and are organising a lobby to show the strength of their support. Several packed meetings of SOAS AUT have voted for a ballot on industrial action and notice has been served on SOAS of an intention to ballot.

EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION**They won't let it die**

THE LEADERS of the main groups in the European Parliament are refusing to bury the European Constitution. Socialist Party head Martin Schulz says, "I find it totally unacceptable that the President of the Commission has just told us: that's it, for me, the Constitution is not a priority, I have other fish to fry."

Schulz says the ratification process had "not yet run its course in several countries", and that the role of Jose Barroso "should be to take the lead over those who are for the Constitution rather than putting it in a drawer."

Head of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats group Graham Watson says, "I think it is too early to bury the Constitution."

Leader of the European People's Party Hans-Gert Poettering says, "This Constitution is still on the table", and all those who think that this Constitution is "no longer topical" are wrong.

Poettering says it "will not be able to be applied in the days, or in the coming weeks, but we hope that after the French presidential election we will be in a new situation."

Agence Europe quotes Poettering saying, "I am perfectly convinced that the only way that we will be able to react to this crisis of identity is if we affirm the values which unite us, in the European Constitution."

• Two MEPs, Alexander Stubb and Iñigo Méndez de Vigo, wrote in the FINANCIAL TIMES calling on the UK presidency of the EU to revive the Constitution: "The Constitution will not enter into force in its current form but it is far from dead. Here is a five-step plan on how to do it. The plan is composed of periods for reflection in 2005, analysis in 2006, preparation in 2007, revision in 2008 and ratification in 2009... The British presidency must show leadership and put the Constitution back on track."

TRADE**Another record deficit**

BRITAIN'S DEFICIT on trade in goods and services for August reached another new record, at £5.3 billion, up from July's £3.9 billion. Services had only a £300 million surplus, the smallest since these records began in 1993. This means the goods trade gap was £5.6 billion. On top of this, shutdowns in our North Sea oil fields caused a £413 million deficit on oil – also a record.

In a flap over bird flu

THERE IS EVIDENCE no evidence that bird flu has been transmitted from one human being to another, but there is evidence that the current hysteria over bird flu has been whipped up by a UN health official, David Nabarro. He asserted that a flu pandemic could kill up to 150 million people, claiming that the virus could mutate so that it could be passed between humans. "It's like a combination of global warming and HIV/Aids ten times faster than it's running at the moment," Dr Nabarro told the BBC. Avian flu, CJD, the MMR vaccination, genetically modified crops, DDT – the scares are the real pandemic, poisoning people's minds, trying to make us all feel and behave like powerless victims.

Although the H5N1 strain of bird flu has killed more than 60 people in South East Asia since 2003, not one person is known to have died after catching the virus from another human – nor even to have caught the virus at all from another person. Those who died did so after coming into close contact with birds such as chickens. There is no evidence that it can be caught from wild birds, which often carry flu viruses.

Following reports that European pharmacists were selling out of the antiviral drug Tamiflu, the WHO's pandemic alert chief Michael Ryan said, "WHO at this point does not advise for individuals to stockpile this drug for any purpose...There is no indication at this stage for anyone to be taking this drug other than the very high-risk groups in areas in which the avian disease has become a problem," including poultry farmers and medical staff. Malaysia, South Korea and Japan have all successfully eliminated the virus, and it has not re-entered their bird populations.

Meanwhile, malaria...

By contrast with avian flu, malaria causes or contributes to three million deaths and up to 500 million acute clinical cases every year. In other words, almost as many deaths per year as the AIDS death total in the last 15 years, and rather more than caused by global warming. The majority of those dying are children – at a rate of four per minute, 5,000 a day, 35,000 a week. Malaria is one of leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the developing world (along with TB, diarrhoea and HIV/Aids) but it is still not recognised in developed countries as a disaster.

In fact, malaria now kills more people than it did 30 years ago. By 1970, WHO's programme of spraying mosquitoes with the insecticide DDT had eradicated or dramatically reduced malaria in 37 countries. Since then malaria has spread rapidly, especially over the past decade, partly because the DDT scare led to bans on its use. But not one replicated study has shown DDT as harmful to humans.

India's malaria eradication programme in the 1950s and 1960s reduced infections from 75 million to 100,000 per annum and deaths from 800,000 to almost none. Over the past two decades, the trend has reversed, with four major epidemics since 1994. In 1996, 2.85 million cases were reported, and the official – and under-reported – death toll was around 3,000.

While DDT has to be used with care, until an alternative can be found, the pressure from 'green' environmentalists to ban it condemns thousands to an early death – another example of a scare story and how the views of scientists are marginalised.

PENSIONS

Divide and rule

PUBLIC SECTOR workers in health, teaching and the civil service will be breathing a sigh of relief, quite prematurely, that they are out of the immediate firing line over pensions following an agreement reached by the trade unions and government on 18 October 2005. The agreement promises lifelong protection for existing pension scheme members. It will open up the schemes for specific negotiations which may or may not improve matters. And it will generate a two-tier pension scheme for new entrants, who can only catch up if they pay more contributions and work longer but will probably exacerbate the non-participation in pension schemes by new young low-paid workers.

The splintering off of health, education and civil service workers will isolate all workers in the Local Government Pension Scheme. But 20% of the scheme's membership do not work in local government: police civilians, further education non-teaching staff, Environmental Agency staff, transport staff, certain privatised utility staff, probation and Criminal Justice System staff, etc. So there will be divide and rule.

There will be a further divide and rule of workers in comparable schemes but not covered by this first tranche of change, for example, police, fire brigades, universities and so on.

Posturing

All the posturing, huffing and puffing from certain trade union figures at all levels, whether lay officials or general secretaries, large trade unions or minnows, looks rather beached. The government did a body swerve in March when it announced the shelving of its original proposals, so as to duck confrontation prior to the General Election. Was it intimidated by the threat of industrial action? The largest local government union, Unison, could barely deliver 23% of its local government membership for industrial action. Other unions, such as the GMB and TGWU, didn't even ballot, they just blinked.

And what of the supposed radical leadership of the civil



Photo: Workers

Public sector unions are breathing a sigh of relief after a deal with the government over pensions. But does it all add up? Or have they become party to a new pensions scandal?

service trade union, the PCS? They have accepted the protectionist deal for what now emerges as three differing three-tier pension schemes in the civil service. So a second body swerve has kept the initiative with the government and left the trade unions once more on the defensive laggards' path.

All the trade unions have looked to a protectionist position, with those in the schemes seeking to protect their own interests and leaving the next generation to find its own way. Cleverly interwoven with protectionism is the argument of advancing equalities, addressing potential age and sex discrimination and recognising that the profile of workers in the public sector has changed – 72% of the workforce in local government are women who will have career breaks, for example.

The unions' list of changes in society (demography, workforce gender, working patterns, healthier workers, flexibility, choice) is in government language and is longer than the government's own list.

Everyone is joyous that confrontation has been avoided, except of course, local government workers. The cabinet have endorsed a deal which highlights consultation, partnership, fairness, no detriment etc. – all the buzzwords of the 21st century. But not for local government workers, or for younger workers yet to enter the professions. their interests have been

PENSIONS

...and it all began in Brussels

WHEN WERE the battle lines over occupational pensions drawn? Three years ago, with the European Directive on Occupational Pensions. That was followed by the Pensions Act 2004, a laudable act that introduced the Pensions Protection Levy and thus led the unions into believing it was about protecting workers whose pension schemes had been looted by private companies.

In reality the act was preparing the ground for ending final salary schemes, reducing scheme terms and conditions, posing flexibility and choice against the

Anatomy of a theft

THE ATTEMPT to divide workers in the public sector by worsening the pension terms and conditions of new entrants seeks to undermine the collective bargaining principle that workers doing the same job should receive the same rate of pay and accrue the same rate of pension. It is true the government would like to have gone further than force workers into accepting different retirement ages depending on when first employed, but let us not pretend that this is the end of their attack: there is more to come. As regularly outlined in *WORKERS*, pensions have been continually undermined. For example, prior to the spurious longevity arguments, the government were already pushing women's retirement age back to 65 under the guise of equalisation with men.

What has underpinned the attack since 1999 but never acknowledged or mentioned, has been the fall in long-term interest rates which has given the government and employers the opportunity to cost future pension payments at all-time artificially high projected capital values. Yields now stand at 4.3%, whereas prior to 1999 they had stood at a minimum of 7% for around 25 years. Although not obviously apparent, a 1% increase in assumed future yield would reduce the current estimated occupational pensions deficit from £57 billion to £21 billion.

All of this of course is based on financial models but suffice it to say that what is being attempted on pensions is akin to the 1929 attack on wages. At that time, it was the Gold Standard that was used as the totem, whereas now they call it EU monetary union and interest rate convergence.

What happened on 18 October was that the government, having already taxed £47 billion from occupational pension investments since 1997, persuaded trade union negotiators to accept a pensions downgrade. This was to help satisfy the recent EU demand that Britain should remove a further £10 billion from its capital expenditure. Trade union negotiators would be better armed in the future if they were to have a more sound understanding of political economy, rather than being pension enthusiasts dazzled by sophistry.

sold by the unions.

The presumption of this government that they can commit to a 50-year deal borders on laughable. The new deal is underwritten by the Treasury, hence Brown is as much to blame as Blair, Prescott and Johnson. Over the next 50 years the proportion of GDP to be spent on pensions will rise from 1.5% to 2.2%. Except for local government staffs. Their pension scheme is to be savaged; retirement ages will be increased, etc.

So what becomes of the 1.3 million

local government employees? Obviously the fight will be for parity with health, teachers and civil servants. No longer one of defend what exists with a view to improvement, but the better of two evils. If the 50-year deal doesn't raise a laugh, then the logic proffered by Britain's largest union, Unison, surely will: that this is a Tory plot to attack workers' rights to their deferred wages – their pensions – by the Tory-led Local Government Association. Unless you recognise that as ritual Labour Party disinformation?

reality of pensioner poverty and means-tested benefits, institutionalising employer pensions holidays and yet taxing the seed corn at the same time.

The net result was that pension schemes particular to Britain's industrial development and past wealth-generating manufacturing base, were and are undermined. Many of these changes were incorporated in the Finance Act 2004, especially the timetable for smashing public sector pensions.

The process does not end there. Within the scheme specific negotiations will arise: higher contributions, the "flexibility" to work until you die, the resistance to trade union pensions trustees ever exerting control over the investment of the schemes, the top-

slicing of schemes by specialist government taxes, as continues to happen, for example, to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme, and so forth.

The frozen asset of workers' pensions in the private sector alone is estimated to be in the region of £750 billion. When the book value of public sector schemes is added to this total, then a further huge slice of accumulated wealth can be added.

There is an estimated surplus of £40 billion in National Insurance funds. Much of these surpluses relate to dead generations, on which the government and the City finance houses intend to gorge. This, of course, is what the EU Occupational Pensions Directive was designed to achieve.

The real purpose of the government's open-door immigration policy is now clear: to undermine the wages and conditions of British workers

Migration and class power

AS A CLASS, we have got ourselves into an awful mess. Of course, it's not all of our own making. For over three decades, we have been subjected to an unrelenting, escalating ruling class assault: more than 30 years of reaction and counter-revolution from our ruling class, which has pressed down on our daily lives, shattered our trade union culture and traditions, circumscribed our hopes and strangled our aspirations.

With only some exceptions, notably the strategic offensive undertaken by the engineers and others in the 1970s against the Industrial Relations Act and the miners' stalwart but ultimately gladiatorial defence of their industry in 1984–85, our class has not attempted to fend off, let alone repulse, these regressive attacks.

We have seen, in the mere span of a person's lifetime, the situation in Britain turned dramatically upside down. From the days of the early 1970s when the media

This article is an edited version of a talk entitled "Migration and Class Power", given at a CPBML public in London on 20 October.

(superficial as always) could clamour "Who rules Britain?" to now, when capitalism is naked and callous in its operations, trade unions are studiously ignored and Big Business is slavishly kow-towed to.

In the 1960s and early 1970s it was possible for Mao Tse-tung to talk about revolution being the main trend. And though with hindsight perhaps it was a slight embellishment, you still had a Soviet Union: not as revolutionary a force as it once was, showing signs of fraying round the edges and with capitulationist talk emerging at times from the likes of Khrushchev and Kosygin, but still exerting a restraining influence on the world of capitalism.

Employment

Post-1945 there was not a commitment to full employment: it was there in reality – or at least capitalism's definition of full employment, with no more than half a million people out of work at any time. Even at the start of the 1970s, the unemployment rate (as calculated at the time, so divide by half to equate with

current figures) was around 3%.

We were in a position to defeat the Labour Party's 1969 attempt to control unions, In Place of Strife and, in the early 1970s, the Tories' Industrial Relations Act. If today it was a truce, tomorrow it could be war.

Workers are thinking beings, and depending on how they think they may then decide to act or not. Workers do not act spontaneously, nor do they act responsively, as a result of cause and effect. Actions and struggle depend on us knowing our circumstances.

In recent years there has been a marked lessening of working class confidence, clarity of thought and class organisation. Material factors were at work, the greatest of which was the rundown and destruction of our industrial manufacturing base.

From 1968 we saw an end to full employment and the re-creation of the reserve army of the unemployed; anti-trade union legislation and reduction of trade union strength; deindustrialisation; and the removal of manufacturing heartlands. Along with this came membership of the European Economic Community (now the EU), privatisation and, at the end of the 1970s, Thatcherism.

The latest weapon in the armoury of capitalism is a massive increase in the numbers of people migrating to Britain. It is not accidental; it is not without purpose. The EU requires free movement of capital and labour. This measure benefits capital, while making labour weaker, more insecure.

The migration attack

Speaking in Bradford in June, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, put it starkly: "Immigration has reduced wage inflation. The inflow of migrant labour, especially in the past year or so from Eastern Europe, has probably led to a diminution of inflationary pressure on the labour market."

Cheap mass labour from Eastern Europe has been used to keep wages stagnant or reduce them. The real purpose of an open-door immigration policy is revealed for what it is: to undermine the wages and conditions of British workers.

The extent of migration

WHAT IS THE SCALE of the recent migration into Britain? Official figures reveal the following:

1997	285,000
1998	332,000
1999	354,000
2000	364,000

Obviously the figures do not count any illegal immigration.

In these 4 years alone, before the accession of the new EU countries, immigration at 1,335,000 exceeded emigration by about 400,000. Since those years immigration has continued to rise. Take the months between May and December 2004: according to Home Office estimates about 130,000 nationals from eight of the new member states alone applied to work in Britain; about 123,000 of them successfully obtained work permits.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 223,000 more people came into Britain than left in 2004 (more than double the annual average from 1997 to 2000). Some 583,000 entered the country. Separate figures predict the population may increase by up to 7.2 million over the next ten years.

The number of migrants from Eastern Europe EU member states has risen dramatically, due to the government's open door policy. The Home Office admits that 14,000 are now arriving every month from Eastern Europe (170,000 a year).

It is estimated that anywhere up to 200,000 illegal Turkish Kurds have entered Britain recently. Of course, if Turkey joins the EU, then that will all become legal immigration.

Apart from Ireland, only Britain (courtesy of Jack Straw and the Labour Government) decided from 1 August 2004 to give unrestricted access to workers from the new Eastern European member states, even though transitional arrangements allowed restrictions for up to seven years.

Many of the EU's original 15 member states, including Germany, France and Italy, still have tough limits on economic migration from the ten countries which joined the EU last May. Even by the EU's regulations, countries can apply their own national migration legislation until at least 2006 and also impose entry quotas in certain professions. In contrast, the United Kingdom and Ireland have moved quickly to remove barriers in their labour markets.

Britain already has millions unemployed, however much the government attempts to reclassify them. This massive influx of labour, often concentrated in our leading urban conurbations, particularly London, will have a significant impact on our wages and conditions and on our creaking services already struggling to cope with needs and reduced financial budgets. In fact, the impact is already there in many areas.

Much of our infrastructure was already under great stress and struggling to cope – schools, hospitals, transport – and now it has this sudden, unexpected demographic change thrown into the equation. It is evident in London as you go about daily life.

Take schools as an example. In June 2005, the Association of London Government published a report entitled "Breaking Point: Examining the disruption



1971, and the fight against the Industrial Relations Act: the three decades since then have seen a relentless counter-revolution. Open-door migration from Eastern Europe is the latest weapon in capitalism's armoury, aimed at lowering wages and conditions.

caused by pupil mobility". It points out that government does not provide any additional resources for schools with high pupil movement.

High pupil turnover is heavily concentrated in specific geographical locations (usually where housing is cheaper – generally poorer areas) and in specific schools. One of the key factors in pupil mobility is international migration. Many of these children do not speak English or do not have fluency in the language.

The report notes that the failure to fund pupil turnover means that schools, particularly those with the additional challenges of high deprivation, do not have the capacity to meet the true level of need associated with mobile pupils or existing pupils with diverse multiple

disadvantages. Most rely heavily on staff to provide support for new pupils by working additional unpaid hours – which in part reflects a dilution of teaching and learning support to all children in that school.

Research undertaken by London Metropolitan University in 2002 concluded there were approximately 80,000 asylum-seeking and refugee children in British schools, with an estimated 62,666 in schools and nurseries in London. In seven London education authorities, refugee children comprise more than 10% of the school roll: a significant concentration. Teachers feel overwhelmed by the numbers of children without English from

Continued on page 10

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Continued from page 9

so many backgrounds.

These levels of migration if allowed to continue will put massive strain not just on the fabric of British society but also on its mental complexion too. A nation must retain the right to control entry if it is to maintain the glue that holds it together. We wish to retain an integrated society.

Most migrants to Britain are aged under 34. Research suggests that many are university educated, prompting real concerns about a brain drain in the countries they have left. Those coming are attempting to escape hardship elsewhere. Do they really think it's going to be easy here? Do they imagine a land flowing with milk and honey? They are in for a rude awakening.

We cannot tolerate being dragged backwards by certain other groups of migrants. There is, for example, no place in Britain for African ritual murders, for devilry exorcism with its maltreatment of children. We tamed our religion a long time ago, and we shall not let religion persecute workers again.

What it means to be British

Are nations outmoded? Capitalism says so. Once capitalism was the spur to the building of nations, sweeping aside the localism and feudal land structures. Now it prefers to create larger economic bases such as the EU, giving power to the larger corporations, weakening working class power. Yet as workers we only have Britain, so we have to save it.

How do we see the composition of a nation? Immigrants to Britain who are serious about staying have the same choice as any other British worker: either join with other workers to improve wages and conditions, preserve liberties and quality of life or ally with capitalists. True integration has nothing to do with appreciation of the national cricket team and warm beer (though many more will be supporting England rather than Pakistan or Bangladesh or the West Indies after this summer).

From 1750 to 1840 our class was torn from the land, drawn to the factories and the towns and thrown into conditions in

'A nation must retain the right to control entry if it is to maintain the glue that holds it together...'

which survival was a daily achievement. They could look to no one else but themselves for protection and alleviation. Without stars, without do-gooders and without political parties, our class founded its own bodies to defend and further the interests of its own.

The whole force of the employers' state was brought to bear upon these emerging working class organisations which, despite imprisonment, transportation to Australia, penury, acts of parliament, spies, provocateurs and even death itself, were never vanquished.

In these years, the British working class first discovered for the world this absolute truth: the necessity of working class solidarity, of combination of labour against capital, of trade unionism.

In contemporary times, have we started to forget, discard, shun or just fail to apply what we knew – the vital local pride; skills; communities; brotherhoods of workers; the culture of mutual support?

Guidance for the future

The Labour Party now is trying to preserve capitalism in absolute decline by elevating the rights of capital above all other interests. It must be pushed aside.

We must treat the Labour Party with the disdain it deserves – do not waste efforts over it. Certainly do not attempt to resurrect it as a true labour party. Do we really want to re-run the setback and disillusionment and betrayal of the last 100 years?

Let it wither on the vine. It can go the way of the Liberal party after the First World War and seemingly what has happened to the Conservative Party after the debacle of Thatcherism. Let the decline be terminal for them all.

And then our class has to face

squarely the conclusion that there is no way out of their predicament courtesy of one of the bourgeois parties or through capitalism's representative democracy.

But how to do for ourselves when trade unions have been allowed to degenerate? Look at class for what it is, not what we want it to be. Rebuild class organisation again. Explore the experience of the British working class organisation. Start with the local.

The greatest gift that the British have made to the world is in ideas: our thinking, our attitude to life. These are largely based on our response to the material changes of industry, manufacture and science – raising collective forms of survival in the simple but stubborn form of organisation: trade unions. We have a way of life to lose; we have a future to gain.

Those going – 360,000 emigrated in 2004 – have a lack of belief in Britain. Good riddance! The ones left will be those with sterner resolution, more mettle, the root and branch.

Cul-de-sacs and the open road

Workers must do for themselves: we are many, they are few. There are but two classes and class is everything. Without clarity about it we do not know who we are or what we are doing. We must be in charge of our professions and protect and develop skill.

We are in a guerrilla war against the capitalist enemy who for the past few decades has analysed our strengths, largely in manufacture, largely in trade unions, and been undermining and destroying these sources of our strength, letting our life-blood trickle out bit by bit.

How do we break out of their encirclement? We need to know what we are defending and when. Choose terrain favourable to ourselves, employ active and passive defence, conserve our strength, and await an opportunity to defeat the enemy.

Do not underestimate, do not overestimate the enemy: the ruling class only has apparent strength due largely to our lack of activity. Developments will occur: if we don't respond, then the response of the capitalists will simply get more intense. Don't wait, or there will be worse ahead.

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Will Podmore

An education secretary who belongs to Opus Dei, a prime minister in a government like this, no wonder we are seeing a determined effort

Education: Blair is taking us back to the Middle Ages

AT A TIME when workers in Britain, a country with a highly sceptical and secular culture, are dismayed by the acts of religious psychopaths who want a fast-track entry to heaven by massacring infidels, the government's drive to push religion through schools continues apace. The promotion of religious thought has become a major plank of educational policy in Blair's third term.

Congregations in the Church of England are at an all-time low but C of E schools are growing rapidly due to government encouragement. Four years ago the Church set itself the target of creating 100 new religious secondary schools by 2008. It looks as if this target is likely to be reached three years early, due to the government's academies programme on the one hand and on the other to more than 40 non-religious schools converting to the C of E since 2001. Another 54 are on the takeover list.

In July this year, Labour reversed a 60-year-old rule that required churches to contribute 10% of building costs for new schools, pledging £550 million from taxes to rebuild every religious secondary in the country.

Evidence

The government justifies its policy by claiming that religious schools are good at raising educational standards, reflecting a widely held belief. In fact there is little evidence for this: although their results can be higher, they have far fewer pupils from poorer backgrounds on average than maintained schools, and many practise covert forms of selection by interview to ascertain "religious commitment". The National Foundation for Educational Research has shown that pupils in religious schools do not make better progress than pupils in non-religious schools.

At present there are almost 7,000 religious schools out of 25,000 state-funded schools in England and Wales. In most, the school governors, rather than the local authority, control admissions criteria and the employment of staff.

Labour's academies are new or amalgamated secondary schools funded by the state but independent of local

authorities and free from many regulations governing normal schools. The academy programme is heavily dependent on various religious groups to keep it going.

The King's Academy in Middlesbrough, where creationism is taught on an equal footing with Darwinian science, has been praised by Blair and by Ofsted. The director, Nigel McQuoid, recently said "...to think that we just evolved from a bang, that we used to be monkeys, that seems unbelievable." Ofsted inspectors branded him inspirational.

'The King's Academy in Middlesbrough, where creationism is taught on an equal footing with Darwinian science, has been praised by Blair and by Ofsted...'

Of 38 new academies in the pipeline, 15 are backed by religious organisations. A typical sponsor is the Oasis Trust, led by Baptist minister Steve Chalke MBE, friend of the Blairs, and planning a chain of six academies. Since he had a revelation at 14, his missionary zeal is to do good to the poor and needy, or as he puts it in a truly Blairite phrase, to those who lack choice. Let's hope they are suitably grateful.

Ministers are now offering such private backers a cut-price deal of four for the price of three on academies, so that instead of having to contribute the paltry sum of £2 million to control the new school, they will only need to pay £1.5 million.

The archdiocese of Southwark will contribute just £200,000 to sponsor the new St Paul's Academy in Abbey Wood, Greenwich. This is because the present site of St Paul's school, owned by

Greenwich Council, is to be sold off to developers for £1.8 million, with the proceeds going to the Catholic Church!

The push to bring the influence of other religions into the state sector has been introduced by the Labour government in the name of "equal opportunities". Sikh, Hindu and Muslim private schools are now being given funding to become state schools. The latest one is the Leicester Islamic Academy, which at present charges £1,400 a year per pupil, which will open in 2007 as a state-funded school. More such Islamic schools are planned in Leicester, and a Hindu school will open soon in Harrow.

Divisive

Since the London bombings, rather than seeing the role of religion in education as dangerous and divisive, some have called for even more religion to be brought into state schools. For instance, in the name of integration, there is now a call to bring the madrassas, Koranic classes for children held normally in mosques in the evenings or at weekends, into state schools. And the Religious Education Council for England and Wales is calling for a new government initiative to force schools to follow a centralised RE curriculum from age 3, on the grounds that many "faith and community members" have concerns about how their faith is portrayed and treated in community schools.

Add to this general picture the fact that we have a secretary of state for education, Ruth Kelly, who is a member of the extreme right-wing Catholic secret society Opus Dei, and a prime minister who prays with George Bush before deciding to go to war, and we can see an ideological onslaught being waged on workers in Britain. In this most secular of countries, where workers take a common sense view of religion and superstition, the supernatural is being promoted by government to divide us and to back the development of ever more authoritarian powers for the state.

Segregating children into religious camps is a dangerous and retrograde step. How will children make a mix of friends, learn about each other, raise

er who prays with George Bush before going to war: with a
 ort to roll back secular education...

le Ages – and beyond



Photo: Workers

Beacons of backwardness: religious schools are being foisted on a secular Britain – at a huge cost to the taxpayer.

questions and develop critical thought if their lives are bounded by religions? The example of Northern Ireland should be enough to teach us where that can lead. And religious terrorism will not be fought by allowing – even encouraging – communities to retreat into ghettos.

The religious delusion that led to death on the London underground this summer has its parallels in all religions, and history is littered with examples of zealous torture, exorcism, abuse,

perversion and slaughter. Will they teach about the burning of witches in the RE curriculum? Those on the “left” such as Livingstone and Galloway, and those in the liberal establishment who bleat on about the need to respect the religious beliefs of others (at present, this seems to mean mostly Islamic beliefs), share the blame for where we find ourselves.

How is it progressive to demand the “right” of girls to go to school with their bodies shrouded from head to foot? Even

Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, has discovered that we are “sleepwalking to a segregated society”.

We need far less religion, not more. Secular thought is progressive for human beings, because when the promise of heaven is removed it becomes clear that we have to make life better for ourselves in this world as there is no other. This fight for a better material existence is what unites us.

The government wants to follow the American example in health care, a private enterprise. But even in the US the model doesn't work.

Wall Street ethics invade health care

CHOICE AND COMPETITION, market forces and the private sector, we are told, will improve patient care and make the NHS more efficient. We have been here before. The old discredited ideas of the internal market from the 1990s are being revived, only this time posing a greater threat to the NHS. Privatisation proceeds by stealth, without any public debate and with the rules rigged to give the private sector a greater foothold in public health care.

The evidence that markets don't work in health care is freely available from the United States. And it is totally ignored. Advocates of the market tell us they bring greater efficiency. In fact, the most wasteful and expensive health system in the world is found in the US, where profit and the market rule.

The US spends \$1.7 trillion every year on health care. That represents 15% of its national wealth, or two to three times what we spend per person in Britain. Americans get little for that money, which goes hand in hand with low use of hospitals and other health services in comparison with other countries.

Premature death

The US is the only developed country in the world which does not provide universal health coverage for its citizens. Forty-five million Americans have no health insurance, mainly the working and unemployed poor. A shocking 18,000 people die prematurely each year having put off seeing a doctor because without insurance they could not afford medical care. The WHO ranks the US a lowly 29th in healthy life span. Its infant mortality rates are higher than in most developed countries. Higher, too, than Cuba's.

Those who can least afford to pay are charged the most. The uninsured and underinsured pay five to ten times as much for health care as the insured. Those who can't pay are sued, have their wages stopped and hold car boot sales to pay their medical costs. Families are left with debts that would take a lifetime to pay off. One hundred million Americans, those with loopholes and exclusions in their insurance coverage, are underinsured.



American hospitals: machines for transferring money to Wall Street

Every thirty seconds someone in America files for bankruptcy following treatment for a serious health problem. Twenty-nine million Americans are in medical debt.

So if ordinary Americans are not benefiting, where is the massive healthcare spend going? On bureaucracy. Every year, administration of the market swallows up \$300 billion on the paper chase of bills and claims.

Health inflation is out of control and the market has failed utterly to control costs. General Motors estimates that its employee health plan adds \$1,500 to the cost of every car it makes.

If American citizens get a raw deal from their health system, at least Wall Street benefits. The profits of Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company, dwarf those of Wal-Mart. Meanwhile American seniors cross the border into Canada to buy drugs they can afford; the Bush administration forbids the sale of Canadian drugs in the US, although they are identical to those produced in the US.

The ethics of Wall Street pervade

American health corporations. HealthSouth, the Enron of health, using the same accounting scams, lied about its earnings to the tune of \$2.7 billion. Senate Majority leader Bill Frist's family business HCA Inc had to pay the government \$1.7 billion for making false claims against its Medicare and Medicaid programmes.

The best kept secret in American health care is that if markets don't work, then government-funded and government-provided health care does. The Veterans Health Care Administration, known as the VA, provides health care for military veterans who are ill because of their military service, poor, or suffer from a catastrophic illness. Fifteen years ago, the VA was renowned for the poor quality of the care it provided. Since then it has been transformed.

Research published earlier this year shows that the VA outperforms the best of the private sector across a whole range of diseases and conditions. In part, the VA has succeeded by becoming more like the

n care, turning it into

NHS. An old-fashioned hospital-based service has been replaced by an integrated health service with strong primary and community care.

Many years ahead of the NHS, the VA implemented an electronic records system which helps clinical decision-making and reduces errors. Devolution of decision-making has gone hand in hand with strong performance management and accountability. Research excellence and an easy transfer of research into practice has contributed, too. All of this is underpinned by a strong public service ethos, pride in and commitment to the VA.

Blocking

International surveys show that Americans are far less satisfied with their health system than people in other countries. Compared with them, more Americans think their health system needs a radical shake-up. But the drug and insurance lobbies that blocked the Clinton health care reforms are doing very well out of the market and will resist any change. Health care barely figured in the last presidential election.

The US health system is a failed market. Costs are out of control. Thousands of health plans and hospitals compete for business. Patients find it impossible to find their way through the health maze. Only the insurance and drug companies profit. Despite all this evidence to the contrary, the British government insists that competition will give patients more choice, drive down costs and improve quality. In reality, choice will be a myth for the vast majority of patients. NHS staff will be forced into the private sector. More money will be spent on administration, less on patient care, and our public service values will be eroded.

It is no surprise that Blair's former policy adviser jumped ship to the American corporation United Health Europe in anticipation of the privatisation of the NHS. The market is not benign, and if the government's agenda is allowed to go ahead, the only people who will benefit are Wall Street and their friends in the City of London.

WHAT'S THE PARTY?

We in the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and others who want to see a change in the social system we live under, aspire to a society run in such a way as to provide for the needs, and the desires, of working people, not the needs and desires of those who live by the work of others. These latter people we call capitalists and the system they have created we call capitalism. We don't just aspire to change it, we work to achieve that change.

We object to capitalism not because it is unfair and unkind, although it has taken those vices and made virtues out of them. We object because it does not work. It cannot feed everyone, or house them, or provide work for them. We need, and will work to create a system that can.

We object to capitalism not because it is opposed to terrorism; in fact it helped create it. We object because it cannot, or will not, get rid of it. To destroy terrorism you'd have to destroy capitalism, the supporter of the anti-progress forces which lean on terror to survive. We'd have to wait a long time for that.

We object to capitalism not because it says it opposes division in society; it creates both. We object because it has assiduously created immigration to divide workers here, and now wants to take that a dangerous step further, by institutionalising religious difference into division via 'faith' schools (actually a contradiction in terms).

Capitalism may be all the nasty things well-meaning citizens say it is. But that's not why we workers must destroy it. We must destroy it because it cannot provide for our futures, our children's futures. We must build our own future, and stop complaining about the mess created in our name.

Time will pass, and just as certainly, change will come. The only constant thing in life is change. Just as new growth replaces decay in the natural world, this foreign body in our lives, the foreign body we call capitalism, will have to be replaced by the new, by the forces of the future, building for themselves and theirs, and not for the few. We can work together to make the time for that oh-so-overdue change come all the closer, all the quicker.

Step aside capital. It's our turn now.

How to get in touch

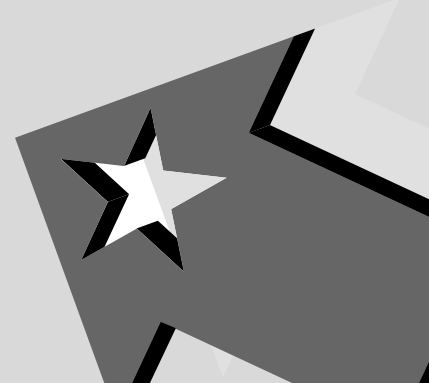
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Back to Front – An occupied country

‘Deregulate, denationalise, destroy. We are in the middle of a slow-motion blitzkrieg...’

INCREASINGLY Britain is being run through Blair from Brussels. Most workers would think that is an overstatement.

Any suggestion that the ‘pensions crisis’ was dictated by the EU receives blank stares; likewise when campaigners against the EU Constitution said that it would lead to privatisation in key parts of our NHS and education systems. The BMA has revealed how the NHS will be privatised further as a result of EU diktat. Public sector unions have shown how the Bolkestein directive threatens us, and at TUC Congress this year education unions showed how the development of Academy schools was a privateers’ charter.

Everything we oppose as trade unionists comes from the EU’s drive for privatisation, deindustrialisation and the free movement of capital and labour. **Deregulate, denationalise, destroy. We are in the middle of a slow-motion blitzkrieg.** Thatcher destroyed the physical bedrock of the country; Blair is knocking over what is left by destroying the vestiges of national political democracy. Hence devolution, hence intense centralisation in Brussels of economic policy, hence Parliament dictated to by the European Central Bank.

Communists seek to link our problems and their causes. The pragmatic, piecemeal thinking of the unions and others puts the blinkers on a more rounded vision. Truth is, Britain is occupied at every level by the EU.

Its objectives deepen every day: the national currency must go, national parliamentary sovereignty must go, capital must go where it pleases, nationally funded health and education must go. Manufacturing and agriculture must be so reduced as to make national economic

self-sufficiency impossible. No government or local authority can procure new projects from its own people, they must go out to tender. Fertile fields must be set aside if their productivity threatens high food prices and high profits. If you have nationally based natural reserves like British coal, gas and oil, they must go. With them you can stand on your own two feet and that will never do. From independence to dependence.

But then it gets deeper, your whole nationally based legal system must be taken over by the foreign power.

In Sweden long-established collective bargaining covering nearly all workers is under threat of dismantling by EU decree. The Swedish trade unions are saying if that is the case, they will leave the EU altogether. Such full-frontal attacks should lead to greater trade union clarity.

There is no excuse for the confusion here in Britain, simply because EU control is so spread around. Just look at all the difficulties that we face. Ask why they exist. Plot the causes. This will take you only a few steps back to an EU directive, policy, law or commissioners’ free market strategy.

They say the EU is neoliberal. It is fiercely capitalist. That is its only social model. They say it is part of globalisation. That means imperialism.

What we have to wake up to, is the fact that it has invaded us, not like an army but like a plague – and national independence is our first priority.

All roads lead back to Brussels, to a bureaucratic, intensely undemocratic machine that administers the member states of the European Union on behalf of a rampant capitalist class. Blair is one of their biggest henchmen.

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